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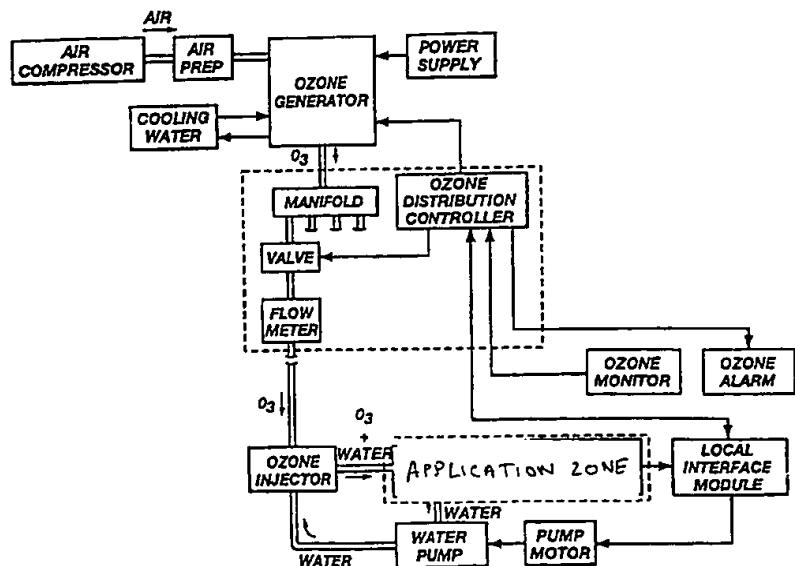
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(54) Title: COLD WATER DISINFECTION OF FOODS



(57) Abstract: The invention includes a method of reducing the microbial population on food in a container. The method generally involves the application of both a surfactant and ozone containing wash liquor to the food. The method includes introducing a wash liquor into the container, thus contacting the food with the wash liquor and wetting the food. A surfactant is then added to the wash liquor. This surfactant containing wash liquor is then allowed to contact the food for a period of time. Next, a combination of ozone gas, oxygen and/or air is mixed into the wash liquor to form an ozonated wash liquor. This ozonated wash liquor then remains in contact with the food for a period of time.

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COLD WATER DISINFECTION OF FOODS

TECHNICAL FIELD

The invention relates generally to a method of reducing the microbial load on foods. More specifically, this invention relates to a method of disinfecting, sanitizing, or sterilizing foods involving the use of ozone in combination with a surfactant.

BACKGROUND ART

Ozone is an unstable triatomic allotrope of oxygen. It is produced in an energized 10 environment wherein molecular oxygen dissociates into monatomic oxygen which subsequently collides and recombines with an oxygen molecule to form a highly reactive ozone molecule.

Although ozone is primarily employed in disinfection, it can perform other functions such as color reduction, odor and taste removal, algae control, oxidation of 15 inorganic and organic compounds in water and waste-water treatment practices, waste gas treatment and bleaching of paper pulp.

The most prominent features of ozone as a biocide lie in its speed and selectivity in oxidation. Biocidal effects are believed to primarily be achieved through oxidation. Consistent with this belief, the ability of any chemical to reduce microbial viability is in 20 direct proportion to its oxidation potential. Ozone is the fourth most powerful oxidizing agent known; only fluorine, fluorine dioxide, and monatomic oxygen are thought to be more reactive. Ozone possesses an oxidation potential of 2.07 millivolts relative to chlorine gas' 1.36 millivolts. It is important to note that an increased oxidation potential is indicative of an accelerated bacterial kill. The rate of disinfection has been demonstrated 25 to be more than 3,000 times faster than chlorine; thus contact time is a lesser consideration in the application of ozone as a microbicide.

Disinfection with the use of ozone may proceed by oxidation directly and by intermediate hydroperoxy compounds that can interact with cytosolic components. Organic ozone chemistry would predict that oxidized organic compounds containing carbon-carbon 30 double bonds give rise to hydroperoxyalcohols. Evidence exists that organic peroxides exert a stronger bacteriocidal action than hydrogen peroxide due to a greater tendency to decompose. No evidence is believed to exist in the literature of any microorganism that

is resistant to the effects of ozone exposure. The application of ozone is preferable due to its compatibility with biota. There are no residual or harmful reaction products downstream particularly in the range of 0-20 ppm. The presence of peroxidic compounds could be perceived to be harmful to the biota, but toxicity studies indicate the contrary to 5 be true. Studies have shown that these compounds are chemically highly unstable and rapidly decompose. It has also been shown that these compounds can be removed by other oxidizing molecules.

In addition to demonstrating powerful capabilities in the destruction or inactivation 10 of bacteria, fungi and protozoa; ozone has been shown to be virucidal. The efficacy of ozone has been reported to range from (all of the following values given reported a 99% reduction) 2.2 mg/l for *Escherichia coli* in 19 minutes from raw waste water; 0.02 mg/l for *Candida tropicalis* in 0.30 minutes from ozone-demand free water; 1.2 mg/l for *Naegleria gruberi* in 1.1 minutes from ozone-demand free phosphate buffer solution and 0.2 mg/l for *Poliovirus type I* in 9 minutes from activated sludge effluent. With regard to bacterial 15 spores (specifically, *Bacillus subtilis* v. *globigii*), ozone has been shown to achieve a four-log reduction within 1.5-2 minutes when water is purged with 3% ozone by weight. Using a non-toxic concentration of 4 μ g ozone per ml of serum, ozone can achieve a six-log reduction in the infectious titer of human immunodeficiency virus ("HIV").

Presently, two methods of "bioburden" reduction are used on food: high 20 temperature pasteurization, and chemical disinfection. The high temperatures used in pasteurization denature proteins and degrade the organoliptics present in food, altering both texture and flavor. Surfactant use alone is incapable of disinfecting to the degree of high temperature pasteurization. Chemical disinfection can leave behind undesirable residues.

Currently, commercial preparation of many foods, which do not normally require 25 cooking, requires the use of high temperature heat pasteurization to disinfect ingredients before they are used. This results in foods that do not have acceptable flavor and texture. A need exists for a reliable cold water method of reducing food bioburden to acceptable levels.

It would be an improvement in the art to have a relatively economical, reliable 30 method of disinfecting, sanitizing or sterilizing foods, which is similar in effectiveness to high temperature pasteurization, yet uses low temperatures to preserve flavor and texture.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

The invention includes a method of reducing microbial load on food, the method comprising: applying an ozonated wash liquor to the food, applying a surfactant to the food, and maintaining the application of ozonated wash liquor and surfactant to the food 5 for a sufficient amount of time to reduce the microbial load on the food.

In the method, the application of the ozonated wash liquor to the food can occur before, during, and/or after the application of surfactant to the food. The application of ozonated wash liquor and surfactant to the food should preferably occur for a sufficient amount of time to remove soils and chemical contaminants from the food (such as 10 fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, mycotoxins, and mixtures of any thereof).

The invention also includes a method of reducing the microbial load on foods through the use of a spray with or without scrubbing and/or a bath with or without agitation. The method includes introducing the food and a surfactant containing wash liquor into the bath, thus bringing the food and wash liquor into contact to wet the surface 15 of the food. Generally, the surfactant containing wash liquor will contact the food for a period of time ranging from about 1 minute to about sixty (60) minutes. A combination of ozone gas, oxygen and/or air is mixed into the wash liquor to form an ozonated wash liquor. Preferably, this ozonated wash liquor contacts the food for a period of time ranging from about one (1) minute to sixty (60) minutes.

20 In one embodiment, the method is used for the disinfection of "shiny-skinned" fruits, such as apples, pears, peaches and the like. This method comprises contacting the whole fruit with a wash liquor at a temperature of about 0° C (Celsius) to about 50° C. The wash liquor is an admixture of aqueous solution and a oleic, or citric acid containing surfactant. The fruit is thus wetted. A gaseous mixture of ozone gas, oxygen and/or air 25 is mixed with the wash liquor to form an ozonated wash liquor containing from about 0.01 ppm to about 15 ppm ozone. The ozonated wash liquor is then allowed to contact the fruit for a period of time ranging from about one (1) minute to about sixty (60) minutes (preferably five to fifteen minutes) thus disinfecting the surface of the fruit.

The process results in disinfected, sanitized, or sterilized fruit. As shown herein 30 bacterial spores are even killed. The temperature can be greatly reduced relative to using high temperature pasteurization, while retaining similar disinfecting capabilities. Alkalinity can also be reduced relative to using only surfactant as a disinfectant. This

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allows for the preservation of the texture and flavor of the fruit, by avoiding protein denaturation and organolptic degradation. The application of the ozone and surfactant combination in disinfection, sanitization or sterilization processes results in improved texture and flavor quality.

5

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating the principal components of a machine utilizing an ozone injection system which may be used to carry out the method of the present invention.

10 FIG. 2 is a more detailed depiction of the "APPLICATION ZONE" component of FIG. 1.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

15 The cold water method (*i.e.*, a method involving water having a temperature of below about 50° C) includes sufficient amounts of the selected ingredients within each operational step to disinfect, or sanitize the food. The actual amounts of ingredients will be dependent on both the food type and the amount and type of disinfection which needs to be done.

20 In a preferred mode, the method is carried out in three steps, consisting of two disinfecting operations followed by a rinsing operation. The first step comprises introducing the food, and a wash liquor including water with or without ozone and a surfactant into a spray or tub, in order to wet the food and bring it into contact with the surfactant. This step lasts for a period of time from about one (1) minute to about sixty (60) minutes, at a temperature of about 0° C to about 30° C, and at a pH of about 3 to about 25 11. The second step comprises adding ozone gas, oxygen and or air into a wash liquor that includes water with or without surfactant and ozone. This is done by injecting gaseous ozone into the wash liquor producing a concentration of up to about 15% ozone by weight in the wash liquor. This step lasts for a period of time from about one (1) minute to about sixty (60) minutes, at a temperature of about 0° C to about 30° C, and at a pH of about 6 30 to about 8. The liquid contents of the tub are then drained leaving the wetted food within the tub.

Methods of generating ozone and producing ozonated liquids are respectively disclosed in U.S. Patent 5,213,773 to Burris, May 25, 1993, and in U.S. Patent 5,181,399 to Engel et al., Jan. 6, 1993. In one preferred mode, the ozone gas is generated from oxygen or oxygen-enriched air by a corona discharge device that produces concentrations 5 ranging between about 1% to about 15% by weight of ozone. The combination of ozone gas, oxygen, and/or oxygen-enriched air introduced into the liquid mixture comprises bubbles of gas having a size from about 5 microns to about 5000 microns in diameter entrained in the liquid portion of the liquid mixture.

In this mode, the concentration of ozone in the ozonated wash liquor ranges from 10 about 0.01 ppm to about 15 ppm depending on the type of food, and the amount of disinfection required. The pH of the ozonated wash liquor at a pH from about 6 to 8. The temperature of the wash liquor is preferably maintained at a temperature in the range of about 0° C to about 30° C.

Generally, the method will use "GRAS" (generally recognized as safe) surfactants. 15 The presently preferred surfactant may contain water, oleic acid, glycerol, ethanol, potassium hydroxide, baking soda, citric acid, and distilled grapefruit oil, and is commercially available under the trade designation "FIT" (available from Proctor & Gamble Corp., Cincinnati, OH.). As an alternative, VEGGIE WASH™ (Horsley, Ltd of UK) may be used. It contains plantaren, sucrose esters, cocoyl glutamate (from coconut, 20 sweet corn and palm kernel oils), trisodium citrate, and glycerin (all vegetable derived). Other surfactants tested were Stepanol WA-100, Surfonic L12-8, Acolec Z-3, Kosher Emplex, Tween-80, Do-Crest 60K, and Alcolec S. Useful surfactants are disclosed in U.S. Patent 5,849,678 to Murch et al. (Dec. 15, 1998), the entire contents of which are incorporated by this reference.

25 Water is preferably used in the present invention as a carrier for ozone molecules.

The third step comprises rinsing the food with non-ozonated water. This step lasts for a period of time from about one (1) minute to about fifteen (15) minutes, at a temperature of about 0° C to about 30° C, and at a pH of about 6 to about 8. The method is completed by draining the rinse solution.

30 The invention is further explained by the following illustrative EXAMPLES:

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EXAMPLE I

A method of cold water washing to disinfect food was tested as follows: 25 ml of a *Escherichia coli* (ATCC number 25922) suspension (a distilled water suspension containing 1×10^9 CFU/ml *E. coli*) were placed on 25 g of raw cabbage for each sample.

5 Samples were placed in the tubs, wetted with water and treated by addition of ingredients to the water. One was treated with only ozone for a period of 10 minutes at a pH of 7.5. One was treated with ozone immediately after adding 0.6g/L of surfactant (FIT®) for a period of 10 minutes at a pH of 8.5. One was treated with a surfactant (FIT®) for 10 minutes followed by a treatment with ozone for 10 minutes, pH was 8.5, the temperature

10 was 21° C. A control was not treated. All were samples were maintained at 21° C.

The ozone only sample resulted in a 93% decrease in *E. coli* relative to the control, the FIT alone resulted in an 82.5% decrease, and the ozone immediately following surfactant resulted in a 98.8% decrease. This shows that the ozone is a more effective sanitizing agent than the surfactant alone, and that the use of surfactant after ozone

15 treatment results in no additional sanitization.

EXAMPLE II

A method of cold water washing to disinfect tomato fiber from naturally occurring microflora was conducted. One sample was maintained as a control. One sample was

20 treated with a surfactant (FIT®) at 0.15 g/l for five minutes. One sample was treated with a surfactant and ozone for five minutes.

The sample treated with surfactant alone resulted in a 40% reduction of the microflora and with the combination of the surfactant and ozone the result was a 56% reduction.

25

References herein to specific Examples or embodiments should not be interpreted as limitations to the invention's scope which is determined by the claims.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A cold water method of reducing microbial load on food, said method comprising:
 - 5 applying an ozonated wash liquor to the food,
 - applying a surfactant to the food, and
 - maintaining said application of ozonated wash liquor and surfactant to the food for a sufficient amount of time to reduce the microbial load on the food.
- 10 2. The cold water method of claim 1 wherein the application of said ozonated wash liquor to the food occurs before the application of surfactant to the food.
- 15 3. The cold water method of claim 1 wherein the application of said ozonated wash liquor to the food occurs substantially simultaneously as the application of surfactant to the food.
4. The cold water method of claim 1 wherein the application of said ozonated wash liquor to the food occurs after the application of surfactant to the food.
- 20 5. The cold water method of claim 1 wherein the application of ozonated wash liquor and surfactant to the food occurs for a sufficient amount of time to remove soils and chemical contaminants from the food.
- 25 6. The cold water method of claim 5 wherein the chemical contaminant is selected from the group consisting of fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, mycotoxins, and mixtures of any thereof.
- 30 7. The cold water method of claim 1 wherein the surfactant comprises water, oleic acid, glycerol ethanol, potassium hydroxide, baking soda, citric acid, and distilled grapefruit oil.

8. The cold water method of claim 1 wherein the food is selected from the group consisting of cranberries, apples, cabbage, lettuce, spinach, eggs, salad components, herbs, and berries.

5 9. A cold water method of reducing the microbial load on food contained within a container, said method comprising:
introducing a wash liquor into said container, thus contacting the food with the wash liquor and wetting the food;
introducing a surfactant into the wash liquor;
10 contacting the food with the surfactant containing wash liquor for a first period of time;
introducing a combination of ozone and gas, said gas selected from the group consisting of air, oxygen, and mixtures thereof into the wash liquor to form an ozonated wash liquor; and
contacting the food with the ozonated wash liquor for a second period of time.

15 10. The cold water method of claim 9, wherein the first and second periods of time are from about one (1) minute to about sixty (60) minutes.

11. The cold water method of claim 9 wherein the wash liquor is removed from
20 the container at a first point, and further comprising: introducing said combination of ozone and gas to the wash liquor at a second point; and re-introducing said ozonated wash liquor into the container at a third point.

12. The cold water method according to claim 9 wherein the wash liquor is
25 removed from the container at a first point, and further comprising: new wash liquor is added at a second point.

13. The cold water method of claim 9 wherein the wash liquor's temperature is monitored.

30 14. The cold water method according to claim 9 wherein the wash liquor is maintained at a temperature of about 0° C to about 50° C.

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15. The cold water method according to claim 9 wherein the concentration of surfactant is from about 0.6 g/l to about 6 g/l.

16. The cold water method according to claim 9 wherein the combination of ozone 5 and gas comprises bubbles having a size from about 5 microns to about 5000 microns in diameter entrained within the ozonated wash liquor.

17. The cold water method according to claim 9 wherein the ozone gas is generated by a corona discharge device that produces concentrations ranging between about 1% to 10 about 15% ozone by weight.

18. The cold water method according to claim 9 further comprising monitoring the ozonated wash liquor's ozone concentration.

15 19. The cold water method according to claim 9 wherein the concentration of ozone in the ozonated wash liquor is from about 0.01 ppm to about 15 ppm of ozonated wash liquor.

20. The cold water method of claim 9 wherein said food is selected from the group consisting of meat, poultry, and fish.

21. A cold water method of reducing microbial load on food, said method consisting essentially of:

25 applying an ozonated wash liquor to the food,
applying a surfactant to the food, and
maintaining said application of ozonated wash liquor and surfactant to the food for a sufficient amount of time to reduce the microbial load on the food.

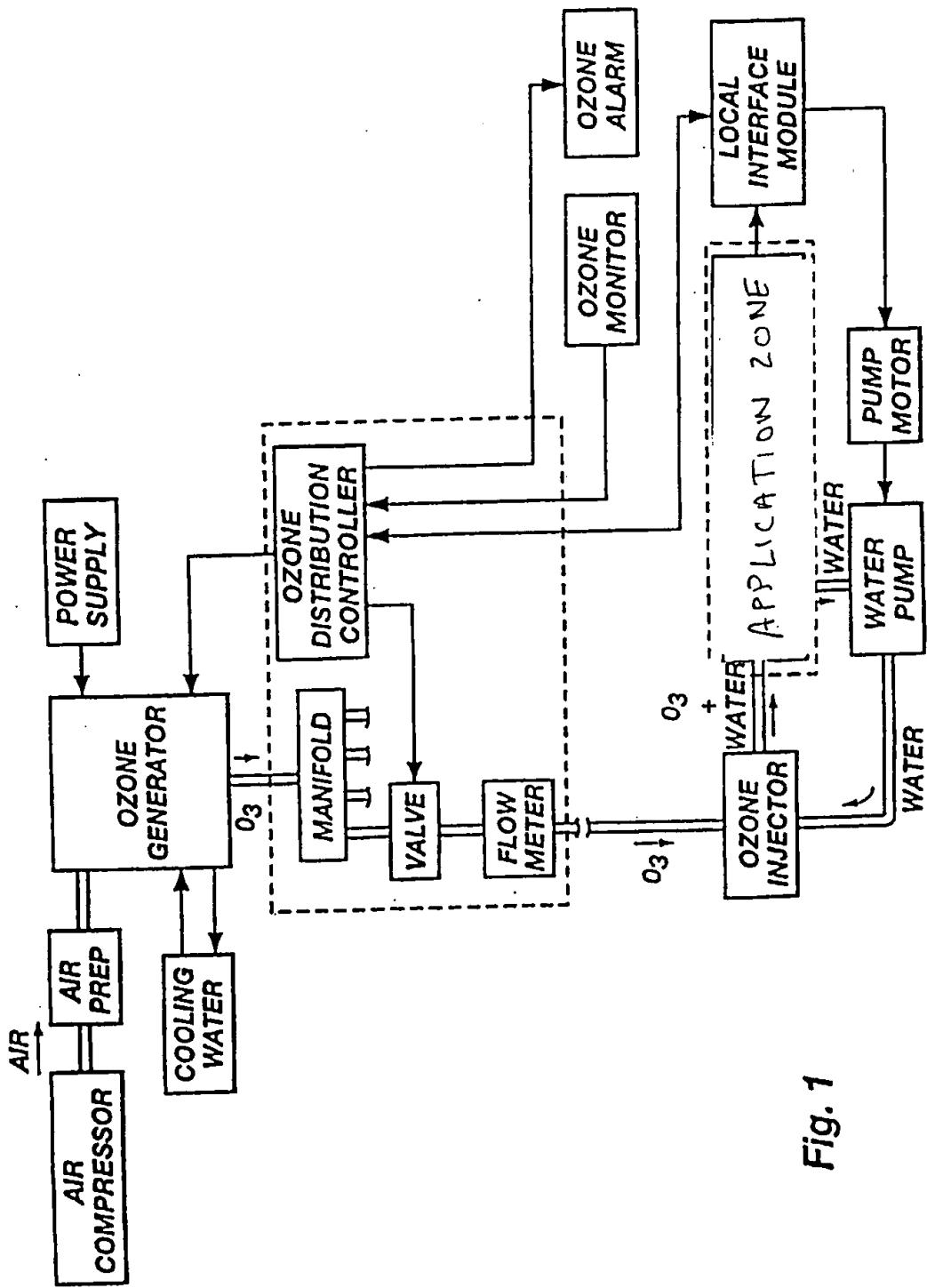


Fig. 1

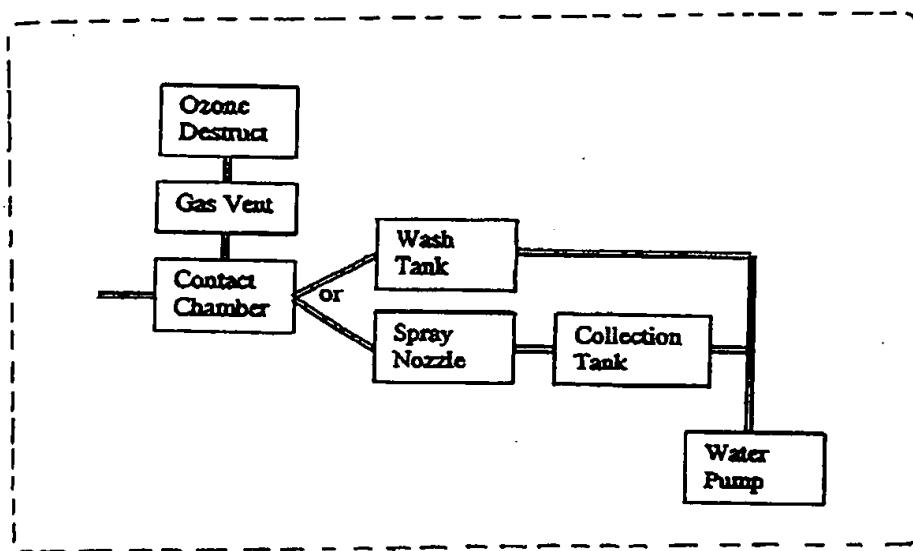


FIG. 2

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/41230

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) :A23B 7/144; A23L 3/00
US CL :426/320, 335, 532, 615, 644

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 426/320, 335, 532, 615, 644

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

WEST search terms: OZONE, SURFACTANT, WASH LIQUOR, FOOD, MICROBIAL, OZONATED WASH LIQUID

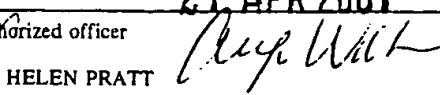
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 4,770,884 A (HILL et al.) 13 September 1988, abstract.	1
Y	US 5,093,140 A (WATANABE et al.) 03 March 1992, abstract, col. 1, lines 29-39, col. 2, lines 39-48.	1, 9
Y	US 5,460,.833 A (ANDREWS et al.) 24 October 1995, abstract and col. 5, lines 59-70, col. 6, lines 1-6.	1
Y	US 5,858,435 A (GALLO) 12 January 1999, abstract.	1-20

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	*T*	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
A document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	*X*	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
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P document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
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